



What Dufferin Should Know about Our Youth and the Future They Seek

In 2019, RBC unveiled RBC Future Launch as a catalyst for change - bringing people together to co-create solutions so young people are better prepared for the future of work. RBC has made a 10-year \$500 million commitment to help Canadian youth prepare for the jobs of tomorrow.

Why now? The bank's survey data presented some glaring observations and a sense of urgency to act:

- *83% of educators feel youth are prepared for work - Yet only 34% of employers and 44% of youth agree.*
- *85% of all jobs are filled via networking.*
- *33% of core skill sets for most jobs will be different within a year and 42 % of the labour force will have skills that are at risk of automation in 10-20 yrs.*
- *1 in 5 youth are struggling with their mental health and 80% of those struggling do not get the help they need.*

And so? RBC partnered with Community Foundations of Canada and more than 150 community foundations across the country to focus on four opportunities to help youth:

- *Get work experience*
- *Grow their network*
- *Gain new skills*
- *Enhance their mental well-being*

The newly registered Dufferin Community Foundation (DCF) eagerly took up the RBC Future Launch Community Challenge – by identifying and funding youth leaders through a competitive grant process to lead their self-designed projects and by facilitating Vital Conversations with Youth.

Despite the challenges of COVID19, DCF and their youth partners delivered:

- *Projects that addressed the needs of the GLOW (Gay Lesbian or Whatever) group in Dufferin. For example, the Crystal Queer mural now proudly displayed on the wall of 5 First St., Orangeville, is just one visible part of the effort by youth for youth to express their experiences and dreams.*
- *Facilitated discussions with youth leaders of diverse cultural, geographic, and gender identities in two Dufferin secondary schools. Thanks to dedicated teachers, communication technology and a professional facilitation team, this report highlights the findings from these groups.*



Vital Conversations with Youth

We asked.

They told us.

- **Don't just talk about it. Do something!**
- **Do it now!**
- **We have ideas! Include us in the planning! We can help make things happen!**

The Format

The Dufferin Community Foundation - working with Elaine Capes, a trained facilitator and coordinator of DC MOVES - approached local secondary schools and other interest groups to find participants and venues.

Teachers Julie Senese of CDDHS and Leigha Turner of ODSS organized groups of student leaders from Student Council, Black Chapter, Muslim Students Association, Gender Sexuality Alliance, Jack Chapter (mental health student advocacy) and Diversity Student Association. The teachers set a tone that encouraged participation and candour. Students were articulate, thoughtful and open about their opinions.

RBC representatives, Lorna Hashem (Shelburne) and Amber Tuck (Orangeville), added greetings and background about the project for each location. Gord Gallagher, DCF President, provided a Dufferin context.

Elaine designed a fast-moving agenda – featuring Dufferin-specific quizzes, prizes and open-ended questions to stimulate discussion. Three key questions organized the discussion:

1. What do you love about Dufferin?
2. What will make Dufferin a truly great place?
3. What should one consider when designing programs to enhance the quality of life in Dufferin?

MaryAnn Lowry, a Founding Member of DCF and Chair of the Grants Committee, provided meeting notes and final reports. Using data capture and Word Cloud technology, MaryAnn was able to retrieve comments and display thematic emphasis in real-time during the virtual sessions.

Shortly after each session, the draft reports were shared with all participants for revisions and feedback. In her feedback, one student thanked the organizers for “this learning experience and for letting youth like me have a say in what happens in Dufferin County.”

The detailed reports, including *verbatim* comments from the students, are attached to this summary as exhibits.

The Findings

Four common themes emerged from the groups. In each case, the students indicated awareness that foundational efforts had been made in Dufferin, but they urged further action to address a problem or build on an opportunity.

A. Build a sense of community that embraces differences

The youth leaders highlighted the importance for diverse cultural and religious groups to “see themselves” in the community. They would like to see retail outlets selling familiar hair products, food and spices; mosques and temples on the horizon; and festivals that are truly meaningful and can be shared with the community as a whole.

Further, they are looking to municipal and regional government to do a better job of recognizing the needs of new residents and to integrate them into the life of the community. Specifically, they identified action on the following programs as getting past rhetoric and symbolism to impact:

- More awareness-building among existing residents of what inclusive and welcoming behaviour looks like
- More diverse teaching staff
- Workplace programs to address bullying and mistreatment
- Workplace programs (with transportation) for youth job opportunities
- Youth-oriented events and activities (e.g., festivals, parades, movie nights, etc.) to educate about other cultures and inclusiveness

B. Make infrastructure, including mental health services, accessible for all the community

Whether they live in towns or rural areas, these youth leaders described the serious limitations in infrastructure – transportation, internet and facilities – available to them. The past year of at-home schooling has simply sharpened the pain for many. It is not just about their being unable to get Netflix. They cited lack of employment opportunities, food insecurity, and a crushing sense of isolation. In fact, these students considered multiple age groups, disabilities and interests in their recommendations.

Students pointed out that they see mental well-being as equal in status to physical access in considering the quality of life in Dufferin. They elaborated the need for access to drop-in mental health services, crisis centres, and victim services as vital.

C. Cultivate the unique character of Dufferin

Among the common threads in the discussions was a desire to retain what's best about Dufferin while embracing change.

Several students in both schools highlighted the natural beauty and open spaces of Dufferin as something they love and that make this county distinctive. For them, the environment not only creates recreational opportunities, but also makes fresh food available locally – at the farm gate and in local markets. They also appreciate the lower population density and a feeling of “smallness” that offers respite from the stresses of larger centres.

In Shelburne, however, they expressed concern about the challenges of preserving the land, and cited the industrialization of quarries, for example. Their minds turned to solutions – rejuvenation of current quarries, reduction of plastic pollution, and creative challenges to businesses and residents to exceed government standards. And these ideas came with a caution: “We are growing so fast here in Shelburne and I think that we need to make sure that we don't lose the precious resources.”

Youth in Orangeville spoke to the strength of the Dufferin arts community. They see it as important to personal and societal development. One student said, “It's one of the things that makes Dufferin stand out among communities of its size.”

D. Activate inclusive municipal listening

In considering key factors for enhancing the quality of life, the students emphasized the need for municipal and regional governments, schools and non-profits to pay attention to changing demographics – not only in setting priorities, but also in creating inclusive advisory bodies to fully understand the impact of proposed actions on different cultural groups. They also noted the importance of treating people as individuals, not just as homogenous groups.

And more specifically, several students expressed interest in being asked to bring their points of view to community conversations. One noted the benefit of inclusion in these discussions:

“We can be leaders in making a change.”

The Dufferin Community Foundation is sharing this report with community leaders to help build the future – through dialogue, embrace of diversity, and thoughtful collaboration.

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MaryAnn Lowry *BA MEd*

Founding Board Member &
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Dufferin Community Foundation



DUFFERIN
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Vital Conversations with Youth

Appendices

Detailed Reports

Centre Dufferin District High School, *February 10, 2021*

Orangeville District Secondary School, *April 28, 2021*



Let's start our conversation with Dufferin youth by thinking about what makes a good community.

A group of students at Centre Dufferin District High School met virtually with teacher, Julie Senese, and representatives of the Dufferin Community Foundation – facilitator, Elaine Capes; data capturer, MaryAnn Lowry; and DCF President, Gord Gallagher – on February 10, 2021. The students brought perspectives from their roles in Student Council, Black Chapter, Muslim Students' Association, Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA), and Jack Chapter (mental health student advocacy).

RBC Shelburne Branch Manager Lorna Hashem sent greetings to the students on behalf of the RBC Foundation, the sponsoring agency for the RBC Future Launch. RBC Foundation has dedicated \$500 Million over a 10 year time frame, supporting charitable organizations specifically around navigating the ever changing landscape of the workforce. "We know there is a gap between youth, education and the workforce", explained Lorna, "which is why we are also donating our time. We have developed workshops and training around our four main pillars: work experience, networking, new skills and mental well-being."

General impressions

The Dufferin Community Foundation (DCF) appreciated that, even though the format would have enabled anonymity, almost all the students appeared on camera. Kudos to Julie Senese for the trusting environment she established. Both Elaine and MaryAnn felt that there had been a real "conversation", not just an exchange of notes.

The facilitation team was impressed by the high quality of the comments and the discussion. In particular, they commented on the maturity of the students' thinking about the community. Not only were these youth leaders knowledgeable and candid, but they were also thoughtful about recommending changes in Dufferin that would affect multiple age and demographic groups.

DCF President Gord Gallagher’s comments afterward aptly summed up the spirit of the meeting, *“If I have one takeaway from today - it is that lots of young people are interested in making the world they live in a better place - and that the leaders of tomorrow are probably going to be women!”*

Based on the students’ feedback, there was optimism that this was just the beginning of a dialogue. However, there was also a thread of concern that there might not be much resulting action. One comment captured the flavour of several reactions: *“This was a great start in letting the youth and students at the table of Dufferin County and I would love to see this continue to grow and let it be an example to other groups in the community to hear the voices of youth and invite them to meetings or at the table for a greater collaboration of all people, ethnics, and ages.”*

This message is one to consider as DCF moves forward on its intention to involve youth in its committees and grant review teams.

Recurring Themes

The discussion was structured around three main questions:

1. What do you love about Dufferin?
2. What will make Dufferin a truly great place?
3. What should one consider when designing programs to enhance the quality of life in Dufferin?

What emerged were themes woven throughout the conversation. The next section of the report captures those themes.

A. Caring for the Environment

Several students highlighted the natural beauty and open spaces of Dufferin as something they love and that make this county distinctive. Our environment not only creates recreational opportunities, but also makes fresh food available locally – at the farm gate and in local markets. They expressed concern, however, about the challenges of preserving the land, and cited the industrialization of quarries, for example. One student suggested that there be greater creativity in these efforts, such as rejuvenating quarries to build recreational settings. Another called for a focus on plastic pollution, with challenges to the business community to exceed government standards. A third suggested a refillery solution so that residents can bring their own containers to refill. And these ideas came with a caution: *“We are growing so fast here in Shelburne and I think that we need to make sure that we don’t lose the precious resources.”*

B. Bringing a Diverse Community Together

A large part of the conversation related to yearning for a sense of community that embraces cultural differences. In the view of this group of student leaders, Dufferin needs less racism, more multiculturalism, more attention to LGBTQ+2, and to BIPOC (Blacks, Indigenous and

People of Colour). The students suggested more varied programs and celebrations (“A pride parade/event would be amazing”). They also recognized that it is important for different cultural groups to “see themselves” in the community – with retail outlets selling familiar hair products, food, and spices, with mosques and temples on the horizon, and with teachers in their classrooms.

C. Paying Attention to Mental Health

Mental health was identified as a major concern in written responses. Although there was some discussion of root causes such as bullying, cyberbullying and a sense of isolation due to cultural differences, the conversation tended to focus on solutions. These included county-wide infrastructure and municipal processes.

D. Making Infrastructure Accessible for the Whole Community

The case for building a workable infrastructure for Dufferin County could not have been clearer. Today, the students find very few options in the infrastructure – transportation and facilities – that is readily available to them. However, their suggestions for improvements transcended personal agendas and considered multiple age and interest groups:

- *“ Consider that some people are unable to get places using cars. Some people don't have cars or can't drive. Some people need parents to drive them places, and if you run programs during work hours then people may not be able to go because they can't get there.”*
- *“ More local services for world issues such as mental health services, crisis centers, victim services. I would like to see a push for local services if there are even drop-ins due to the small population as opposed to having most centers 20-40 mins away.”*
- *“I believe we need to consider the accessibility of certain programs to disabled people but even just how far certain people need to travel to access resources.”*
- *“More fun resources for younger children like toddlers or J-K and S-K students.”*

E. Including Youth in the Decision-Making Process

Several students expressed interest in participating in municipal meetings and DCF activities and in representing different points of view in community conversations. In her feedback, one student thanked the organizers for “this learning experience and for letting youth like me have a say in what happens in Dufferin County”. Another inspired the organizers by declaring, “We can be leaders in making a change.”

The following section provides verbatim comments from the participants.

Peaceful
Not too crowded
Not too much traffic
Fast growing town (rec centre, theatre, library, mono cliffs park)
Local food availability
Low crime rates (lots of farms and local markets)
Special events
How they try to make a difference
How beautiful the area is
There is a lot of nature around
The great landscape with lots of trails and places to soak up the beauty
The people

More youth involvement
More education about Multiculturalism
More resources for BIPOC/ different culture and religions

More opportunities for sports (i.e., rep teams, as we must travel to be a part of something like this) and cultural clubs

I believe the community should become closer through community activities and meetings. Also, there should be more activity/community centres where people can connect better with each other.

More local services for world issues such as mental health services, crisis centers, victim services. I would like to see a push for local services if there are even drop-ins due to the small population as opposed to having most centers 20-40 mins away.

A push to help and raise awareness of developmentally delayed children and adults and other educational differences and challenges.

Maintaining what's already there. Be careful not to lose the features that make Dufferin County great. (agriculture, natural/environmental features)- while we may have lots of things that we want to add, we should try to refrain from taking away the magic that Dufferin County has already.

Focus more on environmental impact - set an example for other areas (clean energy, low pollution)

Transferring some jobs from mining and quarries into rejuvenating and bringing new life to old quarries. This is good for the environment without taking away too many jobs.



We should consider the difference of opinions and accessibility for certain people. (Such as race, religion, disability, culture, political views, financial situation, etc.) Focusing on a vast amount of opinion and seeing what they want and if a certain action is okay or accepted.

Preserving the beautiful land that we have. Our county is full of beautiful nature and arable land and we need to keep it that way. We are growing so fast especially here in Shelburne and I think that we need to make sure that we don't lose the precious resources.

I'd love to see more BIPOC people in and around our classrooms. It's not like there is a shortage of teachers who could be employed. If needed, we could post ads on our websites and around the schools.

And Final Thoughts . . .

Participants were given a chance to react to the report and provided the following comments:

"Thank you so much for sharing :) The report looks very thoughtful and well organized. Please thank them for their incredible initiative and efforts!

"I would like to add that seeing my own comments and quotes in this final and professional document in recap of the meeting makes me feel so involved, listened to, and actually heard/understood.

I love this format of feedback and communication and would highly encourage other organizations or groups to follow suit. :)

"The report looks amazing! I'm so glad that I was able to be a part of it. I was impressed with how they did such a good job letting us know we were heard and it was clear they understood what we were saying. The report summed up everything perfectly and really got our ideas and messages across in detail. Near the end, I appreciated a quote from my feedback: "In her feedback, one student thanked the organizers for "this learning experience and for letting youth like me have a say in what happens in Dufferin County". It made me feel heard, connected, and thankful.

Thanks so much for connecting with me and letting me see the impact that my feedback made. The report is great and I would love to be involved in more meetings like this."

This report prepared by MaryAnn Lowry, Vice Chair
Dufferin Community Foundation
March 8, 2021



A Vital Conversation

With



Orangeville District Secondary School

22 Faulkner Street, Orangeville Ontario L9W 2G7

April 28, 202

A group of five students from a Diversity Student Association at Orangeville District Secondary School working with social studies teacher, Leigha Turner, held a Vital Conversation virtually with Elaine Capes (facilitator and MaryAnn Lowry (notetaker) from the Dufferin Community Foundation.

MaryAnn, Vice Chair of the Board and Chair of the Grants Committee, shared information about the mission of the young Dufferin Community Foundation on behalf of the President Gord Gallagher. She encouraged the students to build influence skills through community activities and invited them to join one of the grant review teams with a view to Committee or Board membership.

Amber Tuck, Community Manager RBC Royal Bank brought greetings from RBC and highlighted recent statistics that inspired the bank to fund its Future Launch Community Challenge in more than 150 communities across Canada.

- 83% of educators feel youth are prepared for work - Yet only 34% of employers and 44% of youth agree.

- 85% of all jobs are filled via networking.
- 33% of core skill sets for most jobs will be different within a year and 42 % of the labour force will have skills that are at risk of automation in 10-20 yrs.
- 1 in 5 youth are struggling with their mental health and 80% of those struggling do not get the help they need.

Amber noted that RBC has committed \$500 million over the next 10 years – the biggest investment in a social issue in their history. Why? RBC believes that Canada’s youth deserve a chance in the new economy, and according to Amber, “We need them to succeed. If youth fail, we all fail.”

And so, the Bank is focussing on 4 opportunities to help youth –

- Get work experience
- Grow their network
- Gain new skills
- Enhance their mental well-being

Elaine began the dialogue phase of the meeting with a set of Kahoot quizzes to test Dufferin knowledge and listening. Then the discussion moved to seeking insights on the community.

What do you love about Dufferin County?

A common theme in the early parts of the discussion was the comfort of living in a smaller community that offers respite from the stresses of larger centres. They cited lower population density and support for the arts as positives in the community.

The sense of smallness seemed to be identified as closeness – with a few different students commenting on the comfort of knowing almost everybody. One student spoke of the contrast in tensions when moving from a racially-charged area to Orangeville. Her comment was that she felt more accepted for who she was here, more like among family.



For me, I love the fact that it's so scenic, and although there is a community, it's not extremely crowded in comparison to places like Toronto or Brampton. It's nice to come up to Dufferin County, because it provides, almost like, a getaway from a more bustling community.

The first thing that comes to mind is how small it is in scale. I like how everyone knows each other, as it helps when looking for opportunities for workplaces or creative projects. It's a lot easier to network when that network is smaller.

I also appreciate Dufferin's view of the arts as crucial to personal and societal development, and I think it's one of the things that makes Dufferin stand out among communities of its size.

My sister and I moved here 8 years ago and we feel like there is a great community here compared to where we used to live. Everyone here is very welcoming and it is a very calm place to live.

What do you think needs to happen to make Dufferin a truly great place in the future?

Nevertheless, the students see room for improvement in preparing the community to adapt to changing demographics over time. They were eager to see some active steps toward embracing diversity:

- More municipal action to recognize the needs of new residents and to integrate them into the life of the community

- More awareness-building among existing residents of what inclusive and welcoming behaviour looks like
- Workplace programs to address bullying and mistreatment
- Workplace programs (with transportation) for youth job opportunities
- Youth-oriented events and activities (e.g., festivals, movie nights, etc.) to educate about other cultures and inclusiveness
- Availability of facilities for diverse local faith-based programs



I think our political climate needs to change. There's a lot of lip service right now, at all levels of government but especially the municipal branch, about inclusivity and diversity and the importance thereof in the eyes of the government, but there's not a whole lot of action being taken, and when it is being taken, it's a circle of community activists who are working to make this a more welcoming, inclusive place, and not the government.

I do think that Dufferin needs to put more effort into embracing and celebrating cultural diversity. While it's still a fairly homogenous region, more and more non-white people are moving here from places where housing may be more expensive, and I don't feel that Dufferin as a whole is doing a great job of recognising that and working to help integrate new people into the community.

The community needs to be more inclusive when it comes to different races.

Teaching the community how to be respectful towards one another, and what acceptable behaviour actually is

Encouraging workplaces to tend to their employees' needs when it comes to complaints about mistreatment

There should be direct, intentional means of educating the youth of Dufferin County about different races and culture. Initiatives like festivals, movie nights, educational resources that will help kids who may not usually be exposed to other cultures learn

about them. This can really help as they get older, and eliminate implicit bias from an early age, which results in a more inclusive community.

Activities for youth – drop-in programs, etc.

Job opportunities for youth - including access to transportation

To connect to ideas of cultural and religious diversity, opportunities for people to practice their faith without leaving town. More diversity in religious institutions.

What things need to be considered when designing programs for enhancing quality of life in Dufferin County?

In considering key factors for enhancing the quality of life, the students emphasized the need to pay attention to changing demographics – not only in setting municipal priorities, but also in creating inclusive advisory bodies to fully understand the impact of proposed actions on different cultural groups.

This awareness of diversity must extend to rethinking concepts such as accessibility – where mental access should hold equal status to physical access in considering quality of life. Further, the students recognized the importance of treating people as individuals, not just as homogenous groups.

Again, they spoke to their desire for clear and concrete action, not just platitudes.



groups
justice
individuals
significant
access
responsive

How people will be impacted as individuals, rather than collectively.

Changing demographics (age, faith, race/ethnicity etc.)

Responsive. Ensuring that celebrations, festivals, etc. actually reflect the significance of and meaning of an event, rite, or ritual.

Moving from charitable activities to social justice.

Accessibility is important. Not solely physical accessibility, but mental accessibility as well. Mental health needs to be taken into account when designing programs to enhance quality of life, because it's really about half of what we mean when we say "quality of life."

When making decisions that affect Dufferin County as a whole, a panel that accurately represents the demographic of the county must be a part of the process.

Final Thoughts from the Reporter

Although the discussion group was small and the electronic format reduced back-and-forth conversation somewhat, the students presented diverse perspectives, articulated their ideas thoughtfully, and built on each other's comments. There appeared to be a sophistication about municipal governing that had not emerged in other groups. This reporter took away the message that Dufferin County is open to change, has sources of energy, and needs to advance ideas and plans to action.